

“THE STAINS”

THESIS

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for The Degree of
Sarjana Sastra

VINA OCTAVIA

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ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE DEPARTMENT

FACULTY OF LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

SATYA WACANA CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY

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THE STAINS

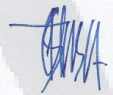
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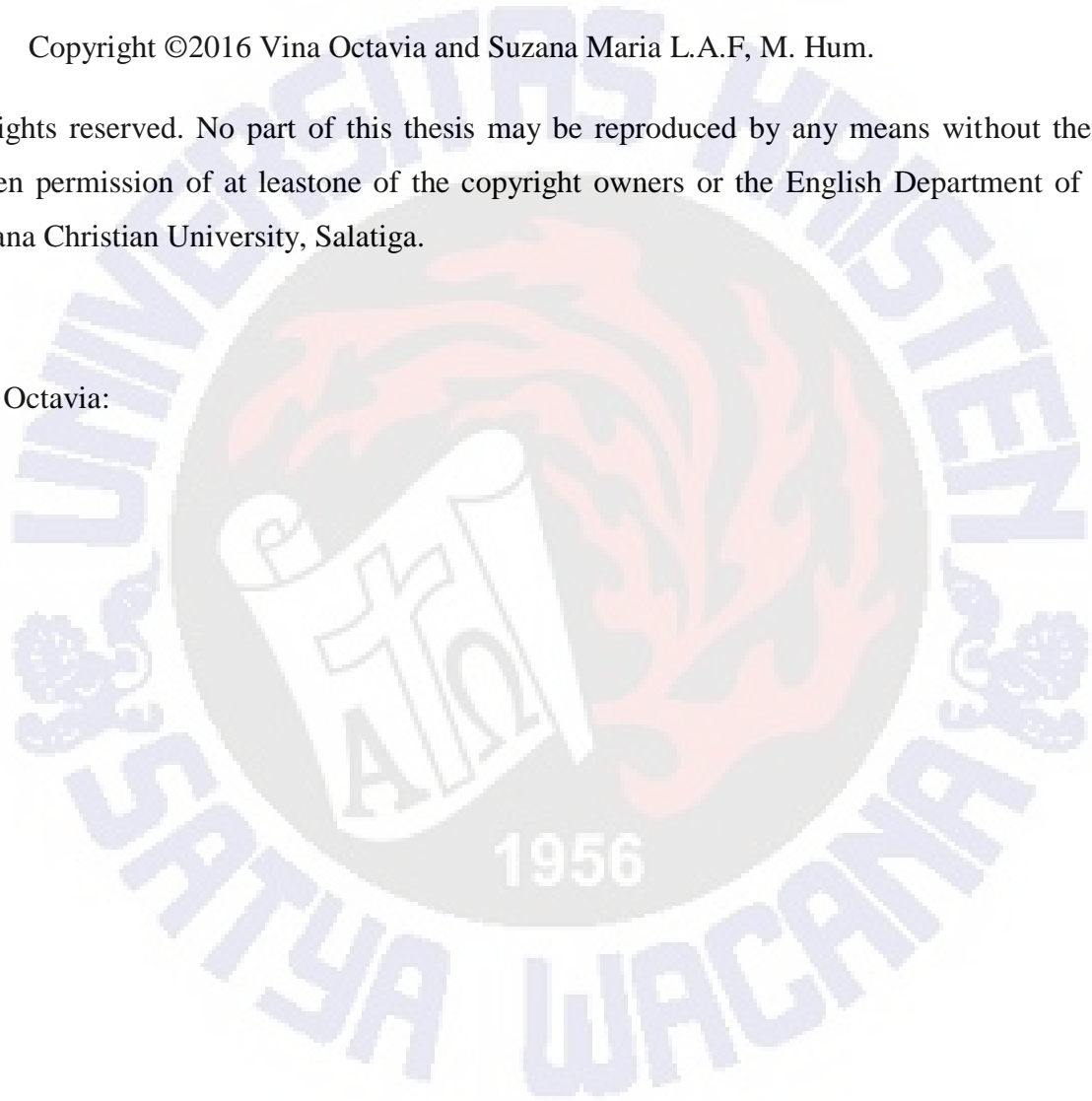


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Afterword

It is still pretty astonishing even for me; that I was able to finish this project. It was a rocky, bumpy road from the beginning. I was unsure whether if writing this is appropriate, I was unsure whether I can pull this off or not, I was unsure whether this will be good to read or not, it was full of anxieties.

Writing this project wasn't an easy task, there were points where I feel like giving up, just like the story of this book, everyone may feel anxious about everything. It's humane and totally normal. However, I have been way too anxious of myself that I often limit myself to lots of new things. As I grew up I realize that it is wrong to live in fear, which is one of the reasons of writing this project.

The first idea of writing this project originally came from myself; that I want to push myself more by taking a "writing" final project, which is a challenge for me, as I'm more of an academic person in terms of writing. I also want to write something personal, which you can clearly read in the first story; people who know me in real life will know that I too, was born with a birthmark on my face. Living with it was not easy, the whole twenty years of my life. However I grow to get over it. It was not easy and not everyone might have been blessed with a family and friends as understanding as me, thus I want write a story about how an individual was able to get over her biggest insecurity.

Of course I can't only write the story solely based on myself, so I did observe a lot of people in real life and social media, and that's when I realized; *it was not just me*. I talked to high school girls, my friends, and my married friends to find out that no matter what age group you are, you still feel you're lacking something, as if there's a pressure from the society. I also stalked a lot of high school girls in their social medias just to see how they interact and how they evaluate things, and themselves.

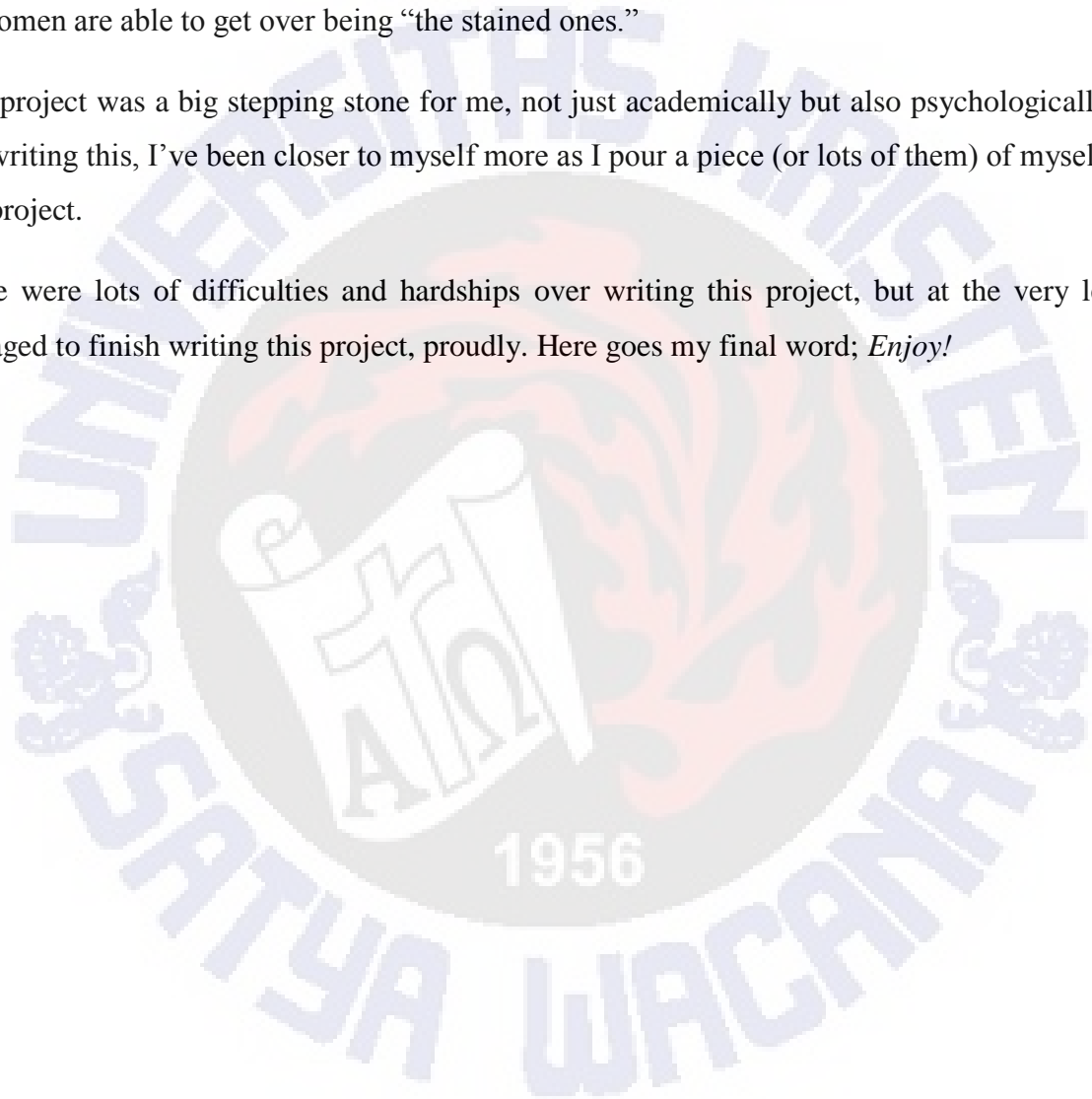
Everyone feels anxiety and insecurity, as far as my observation goes. Yet still, I do find women are more tend to feel that way about themselves because of the society's standards on women, which is a little unfair if compared to men. That is why this project is constructed using feminism

theories. I want to empower women, that their values are way more than their appearances, body, or virginity.

Many women are marginalized and there are also many strong women who were able to overcome all that, which is the reason I changed this project's title to "The Stains" as it originally was planned to be "Living in A Stain." I believe that just like the three girls in these three stories, all women are able to get over being "the stained ones."

This project was a big stepping stone for me, not just academically but also psychologically. As I'm writing this, I've been closer to myself more as I pour a piece (or lots of them) of myself into this project.

There were lots of difficulties and hardships over writing this project, but at the very least I managed to finish writing this project, proudly. Here goes my final word; *Enjoy!*



LOGBOOK FORMAT

Name : Vina Octavia
Student Number : 392012015
Project Title : Living with a Stain

Date	Activities	Progress	Problems	Advisor Suggestions	Advisor's Signature	Student's Signature
09/04	Introduction	Sharing plans and ideas.	I was unsure if writing a semi-fiction is allowed or not. I also shared my idea privately with my advisor for the first time. I have never shared my ideas for this project before because I doubted it a lot.	More observations More academics support		
09/18	Gathering ideas	Brainstorming	Lack of sources Lack of theories knowledge	Read more theories Start to make the abstract		
10/01	Reading theories	Focusing on psychoanalysis feminism	Difficulties to understand the theory.			
10/6	Writing	Starting on the prologue	Connecting the ideas			
10/21	Writing	Starting chapter One	Impersonating the character			
10/26	Watching Inside Out	Gathering Ideas	Understanding how to explore a person's mind	Be more natural in writing conversations		
11/01	Writing Prototypes	Gathering Ideas	Story #1			

11/13	Mini Seminar		Received a lot of helpful feedbacks			
11/20	Writing Prototypes	Writing drafts	Starting on the rough plot of Story #2 and #3			
11/26	Writing poems	Writing the poems for the stories' opening.		make it more "fiction"		
12/03	Writing story #1		Difficult to make it less personal as it's semi-biography	The story was progressing a little too fast.		
6/04	Writing story #2	received first revision	gathering ideas took me too long			
7/12	Meeting advisor	starting draft for last story				
10/06	Gathering ideas					
11/10	Start writing story #3			Adjust the speed of the climax.		
11/20	Finished writing last story					
12/03	Meeting advisor for revisions					

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The Stain on My Face

I was born with a pair of almond-shaped eyes.

I was blessed with a nose everyone envies.

I had a body everyone longs for.

I had a silky hair everyone might adore.

Yet, I can never hold my head up high.

Because everyone stole a glance,

when they had the chance.

Not because of my face nor my thigh.

But because of the stain on my face.

This detestable yet indelible stain.

That always swathe everything else.

With its dark, hideous appearance;

This stain; on my face.

I started my day none other like the usual, right after I woke up I dragged myself to the bathroom to brush my teeth. Yet, once again I have to face the least thing I wanted to face.

I walked towards the mirror, and here it is. My own face.

Don't get me wrong, I'm not exactly what you would call ugly, in fact I'm quite a looker, if I may say so myself. I have a nice pair of almond-shaped eyes and my nose is even pointier than most people out there. I'm not overweight and I'm not a midget either. My lips are indeed a little thick. So, based on my overall evaluation of myself, nothing is really hideous about my appearance but this ugly mark I had since birth which of all places, had to be on my face. I guess it's a fateful thing, since even my mother named me Desta, which means fate. Anyway, it might be fateful but it will never make me grateful.

I can't really do anything about it, I can't cover it with make up since I have to go to the hell they call school everyday and it will look even more disturbing. I can't even blame it on somebody because, who could I blame? God? My mother? My father? Or should I blame myself? I really don't know, everything is neither right nor wrong about this unsightly mark. All I know, it should never have existed in the first place.

Today is no different from any other day, I have to suck it up and go to school. I hate going to school. Well, who doesn't?

Don't get me wrong again, it's not like I'm bullied at school. In fact, I even hang out with what you might call the "cool girls" clique since junior high. The clique consists of Jessica, Cindy, and me. Jessica is the school's Queen Bee and Cindy her loyal sidekick. Quite Impressive, ain't I?

I might look a little out of place and many girls think that I am the ugly duckling of the group but everyone in this school gets used to it even though I still have to deal with the occasional stares until today.

RIIIIIING!

The bell for first lesson rang. It's mathematics to start with. Mr. David is the least favorite teacher for all of us, especially me. So, I took my usual, literally "coldspot" which is right under

the air con so I could take a nap while he's teaching us about numbers and problems that were never existed in the first place.

I was the fastest to occupy the seat for sure, yet one unhappy immature, named Ray came up to me and demand for my "cold seat."

"You, move!" Ray shouted to me from afar.

I ignored him as I pretended to be asleep, laying my head on the table. I swear I'm good at this. It's a skill I have been mastering for years. However, he didn't buy it.

"Don't ignore me, you lipstick-smeared faced girl!" once again he shouted. This time, it gave a bad ring to my ears. He said it to my face, again.

I was already feeling bad because of mathematics. And yet, he shouted things like that right into my ears. I felt so angry, I wanted to eat him alive, I wanted to talk back and stood up for myself. But I stay quiet even though I'm burning inside. I can't see his face but I can feel that he's giving me the dirty look for keeping my calm.

I tried my best to suppress my anger and I think I did a pretty good job at it. Yet, my two so-called besties came back from the bathroom photo-session and decided to make a scene out of this. Sigh.

"Hey! Why you gotta be so mean?" Jessica snapped at him.

"Yeah. So rude, and so ignorant! Don't you know that you're despicable?" Cindy added.

Both of my Barbie-besties attacked him with their pitchy voice, which made him sighed and leave while he muttered, "Why do they have to stand up for that ugly lipstick-smeared face?"

I don't want them to stand up for me too. I don't like to be pitied by the likes of them, beautiful stain-free girls. If only they were born with ugly birthmarks like mine I doubt they'll do the same thing. However, since I am the lipstick-smeared faced one, so I have to be grateful and say thanks.

"Thanks, girls" I said while faking a faint smile.

“No problem! You should try to stand up for yourself though,” Jessica lectured me.

“I wish I could,” I replied.

‘I know I could’ was my actual reply. However, it is always easier to play the victim. And I already looked like one, so what’s the harm of playing victim? It’s convenient as people will never put the blame on you and they will just feel sorry for you instead.

After two hours of mathematics, it’s finally break time. Everyone rushed to the canteen like they always do. I was planning to buy some chicken *katsu* for myself. No lunch for my two Barbie-besties because they are on diet, as always.

So I walked down to the canteen in the first floor by myself. When I was ready to get into the queue for a plate of chicken *katsu*, I see Ray. The last person I want to see today. I turned my back quickly, trying to avoid him. However, it was too late. He saw me.

“Hey,”

I pretend to not hear and walk away, but he shouted “Hey, Desta!” and so I have no other choice but to talk to him.

“What?”

“You should tell Jessica and Cindy to stop bothering you. If you want to, talk back to me by yourself.”

So many words are running wild on my mind right now. I feel like slapping him and scream at him with words nastier than his. Good for him, I have good self-control. So I just left, without any chicken *katsu*.

Those words made me lose my appetite. It’s not like I can’t talk back to him, I just don’t want to. If I do talk back to him by myself then probably he’ll just say other mean stuffs about my birthmark. If I don’t say anything by myself, he calls me a coward. This world is wicked. Nothing is ever right or wrong.

As the clock tickling and my stomach grumbling, classes are finally over. I walked to the parking lot after saying goodbye to Cindy and Jessica. I looked around finding my dad who picks me up every day.

Soon after I hop in the car, dad asked me, “Did you fight with your mom again?”

I replied with a squinting eyes and a frown, which means yes.

Again and again this morning was just like the other morning, I argued with mom before I’m off to school. For the simplest reason (according to her) but it was her who just doesn’t understand me.

She told me to tie my hair up because it looks messy. How ignorant of her. Why can’t she put herself in my shoes? Well, I understand that she probably will never be able to do so though as she was born into this world with a pretty, stain-free face , unlike me. I can’t even tie my hair up because it would expose my stained face even more. Just imagine, even with my hair down, there is always someone like Ray, who make fun of me. What if I do so?

For that very reason, semi-unconsciously, I snapped at her when she tried to tie my hair.

“STOP IT, MOM!”

She was shocked, a frown immediately popped out in the middle of her brows.

“Did you really have to yell like that in the morning?”

“Oh, yes I did, since you seem to know nothing about your own daughter.” I replied.

“You’re babbling nonsense, again,” mom sighed.

I know what that sigh means and mom knows that I hate it.

That is how she always replies to my insecurities and anxieties. She will always take it as something nonsense and unimportant.

“Listen here mom, you gave birth to me and now you are treating me so indifferently just because I was born defected. I know,” I said as my voice raised.

My mom has this confused look on her face. I know why, and I am very well aware of what I just said to her, I'm not sorry though. Just to clarify, I am not psychopatic or whatever, it's just that I often lost my cool under this matter.

Because once again, I know that this birthmark, which I have been calling a stain since I know that it really is named a port-wine stain because of the color, is impossible to be totally removed. Laser treatments are only able to reduce the appearance of the birthmark, but total removal is practically impossible. I knew this since I was a ten-year-old from a doctor in Singapore. It was one of the most heartbreaking words I ever heard in my life.

Mom did not answer, she just walked away and said, "Just go to school now, your dad is waiting in the car already."

So I did, and that was the reason of this morning's grumpiness.

By the time I got lost in my thoughts, we have arrived at home. The first view that I saw as soon was mom who welcomed me home and offered me to eat lunch with her. She behaved like nothing happened this morning. This is how we made up, this is how we always do, we just let it slide once our anger is gone.

However, I was still grumpy so I went straight to my room, leaving mom with a puzzled look on her face. I slammed the door, locked it up, and curled myself up in a corner of my room.

KNOCK! KNOCK!

"Open the door, Desta!"

It must be mom. She's probably going to nag at me for behaving like an impudent child, or something like that. I, however, refuse the idea of getting scolded after a bad day so I didn't move an inch from where I sit on the floor. Not until I saw my phone beeped from a notification.

I was going to take it from the pick it up then I remembered that it was probably from Andre. My boyfriend of six months, who I have been ignoring for two days.

He also does not know how to deal with my problem. I should not blame him for this, because I also could not do it. However, he took my mom's side when we fought two days ago.

Not one person, even my family understand how I feel. They simply say being different makes you unique. I wonder if they were born just like me, would they appreciate being different so much?

As I curled myself up in my room, I fell asleep to such thoughts... I fell to a deep sleep where my dream brought me to the year of 2008.

I saw a tiny me, as I remember I was seven years old when I had that bowl haircut. I was in the bathroom of my old house. In that small bathroom, I was rinsing my face all over again with water. I did it numerous times and after every single rinse, I kept my eyes closed for around five seconds.

And not long after I stopped. Even though they did a great job camouflaging, I can still spot that the water on my face fused with tears that run down my eyes. Those tears snapped me from my sleep. I lay on top of my bed with a heart beating so fast, with cold sweat all over my body. I opened my eyes and tried to control my breathing while realizing that it was just a dream. While I'm still trying to catch my breath and follow up to the fact that everything was unreal, I felt even more depressed.

That thing from over ten year ago, still bothered me so much until I dreamed of it. Maybe I'm no longer normal. Maybe deep down I have been so badly traumatized and so unaccepting of my birthmark, and I probably was the one who was unaccepting of the fact that this stain can never be gone. These facts actually make me think that I'm not normal. I'm the one at fault. I'm the one who's stuck in the problem. But.. isn't it unfair? I can not choose whether I want to be born to this world with or without scars. I was not open to an option.

"Was I that dumb?" I mumbled to myself.

The answer is I was. I believed that rinsing my face with water will somehow fade the stain on my face magically. I thought some water is blessed or whatever. How innocent.

The dream felt so real that I woke up with tears all over my face.

That whole night, I couldn't seem to put myself to sleep. Maybe because I took a nap, or maybe because my mind were filled with my thoughts. I got myself to think that the reason why I am

unhappy now is because I had lost my innocence. I am now aware of the fact that I have no hope of having this birthmark removed. I am now aware that I got nobody to blame for this. I know that this is something that can't be changed.

Would my life be any different if I was born without this stain? Probably it would. I would probably be happier. I would probably be a better daughter to my parents. I would probably be a better person than I am today.

I would not be as cynical about life. I would not be as unsociable. I would not be jealous of everyone else. I would not be blaming others. I would not be hating myself every second I realize that I am imperfect.

I know I'm doing this for nothing, this won't change the fact that I have a hideous birthmark. I know I'm doing the wrong thing. But I just can't seem to get over the fact that this is the only thing I can do besides being grateful.

I started to question,

"Is it possible for me to be grateful?"

If only I can be grateful for what I have instead of hating my life like what I do until today. Would I have been able to lead a normal, happy life?

"Being this way this won't change anything" suddenly a notification popped up on my phone. It was a text from Andre. I glanced through it and flipped my phone on its back again.

My relationship with him is as bad as my relationship with my mom, we fight all the time. While we usually fight over trivial things, this time it's no joke. I caught, or find out, technically that he was cheating on me even though he denied it. I already guessed it though so it was not as shocking.

Why don't we just break up? It's not that simple, at least for me. I need him as a validation of my existence. Having a boyfriend raise your social standing, people no longer look at me with "Poor her, nobody wants her because she's ugly" anymore since I started dating him.

However, it is an absolute no for anyone to know that our relationship is not going smoothly, furthermore I was cheated on. Nobody shall know. I never spoke to anybody about my relationship, all they know is that “we’re fine” and that is all. I’m not really a fan of sharing my private thoughts anyways, so that does not bother me much.

So yeah, it has been two days. I should give him a reply. I texted him to come to my house and talk, in hopes that he will act nice and loving so that I’ll forgive me.

His house isn’t that far by, so he is in the front door by around twenty minutes. Mom had welcomed him into the living room by the time I got there.

“Hey,” he said, with no signs of guilt on his face. That is the only thing I can’t stand. I am aware of the fact that I deserve to be cheated on. I don’t have a good personality and I’m not pretty either. But why doesn’t he have the decency to at least pretend to be guilty in front of me? Am I that worthless in his eyes?

I was so mad that I decided to ignore my thoughts of making up with him. I’ll piss him off the same amount he did to me.

So I begin my plan with a question; “Why are you here?”

“Am I not allowed to visit my girlfriend?” he answered jokingly.

“Am I your girlfriend? Isn’t your girlfriend “her”?”

“What do you mean?” he replied with an question plus pretended to be confused look.

“I know what you have been doing behind my back. I know everything.”

Andre sighed, “wild assumptions, again and again.”

I was not only assuming, I knew the truth. It crushed my self-esteem till it hit rock bottom. All I have been thinking at night in the last two days was that he cheated on me because I’m hideous unlike other perfectly normal girls out there. He must be thinking on how ugly my face and personality are while cheating and looking for other girls.

“Are you that fed up with me?” unconsciously those words came out of my mouth.

He got up from his seat and walked towards the terrace, completely ignoring my presence.

He sat on the bench and lit a cigarette. He always say that he smokes only if he's under stress and it seems like he always smoke everytime he met me.

I can't stand it anymore so I decided to talk to him, I want to end this relationship that only makes me even more unhappy.

"You know what"

"Hmm?" Andre responded unenthusiastically.

"I think we should just end this. This is enough. All we ever do is fighting. You're cheating on me and all you do is hurting me."

"It's not surprising though, I'm hideous unlike other girls. I can never be pretty like normal girls." I kept on babbling

He replied annoyedly, "Sure. Let's just end it."

"It's tiring to be in a relationship with a girl who's too insecure to value herself."

"You have been doing this forever, Desta. You're smart, you should have know that talking down about yourself like that will not only change anything but also hurting yourself. Besides, I dated you while knowing about your birthmark all along. It didn't bother me at all. That should be enough," he continues.

I nodded my head and said, "Okay, I get it. So are we good now?"

"Now that is your problem. You always say you get it, you always say you get over it, but you never are. We can't stay in this kind of relationship. You can't love others when you can't even love yourself."

Just like that, he dumped me.

However it's weird that I don't feel even a bit of sadness. All I can feel is hatred, towards myself.

All I could think of is that he dumped me that easily all because I am me. That I am Desta, who is born with ugly birthmark.

I tore all papers in my sight, throwing and destroying everything he gave me, and yet holding out to scream out of anger in my room. After a while, I finally am able to cry. I just realize that I might just have lost someone who really accepted me despite of my flaws and imperfections. All because I'm ugly and insecure.

Mom caught me with my swollen eyes when I was going to wash my face.

"Why are you crying?" she asked.

"N-nothing" I stuttered a little bit because I was surprised.

"He is a good boy and he accepts you for who you are. Why are you breaking up with him?" mom asked out of nowhere.

"He told me you two broke up after he went home. He told me he can't handle you anymore."

That snapped me, again, "Of course he can't, because he didn't love me. Who would love someone as ugly as me?"

"So do you think I don't love you? You're my child."

"Probably you do. But you must be ashamed for having such a hideous daughter with a stained face that look nothing like you!" again, I talked without thinking.

"I am ashamed of having a daughter with a stained heart," mom turned his back from me, "just so you know, it's your heart that is stained, not your face. You look just perfect to me. Just like any normal person do."

I don't know how but somehow I can see mom's tears.

I began to think, and realize..

Maybe I only overthink everything. Maybe mom and Andre was right. Maybe they were just telling the truth.

It was me.. who chose to close my eyes.

It was me.. who hates myself and others just because I needed someone, or in fact many people to hate on.

In fact I'm not sure whether mom is ashamed of me or not, that's just my assumptions.

In fact I'm not sure whether Andre is cheating on me or not, that's just my assumptions.

In fact I'm not sure what other people think of me, everything is just my assumptions.

My eyes were open the whole time, but my mind was not.

All I needed was an open mind.. and a little confidence.

There will always be people like Ray, who might discourages others in life.

But among all, there will always be people who appreciate and accept you for just the way you are.

I might be imperfect, but so do others.

Others carry on with their lives, and maybe I should do the same.

Ever since then, I started to change little by little. I'm still insecure about my birthmark, but not as much as I blame others for it.

I'm still the same, but I'm different at the same time.

Even though sometimes I might look back to the past and feeling down about life, everything still ends up smoothly, because I have covered my stained heart with the best foundation called kindness and acceptance.

The Stain on My Body

Living inside a fortress
with duties of a princess.

A life to please everyone
can be a torment to one.

Your every moment is being watched
and judged.

Yet, your voice is left unheard
and ignored.

It's a hell you can never escape.

As it has no shape.

You can't figure it out.

As you got lost in doubt.

Nothing's pleasing enough,
life seemed so tough.

The biggest fear of oneself,
is being trapped in the thoughts of itself.

You received a question from an anonymous – “Are you a virgin?”

I was laying around in my bed while playing with my phone when that notification from *AskMe* popped up.

Lately I have been receiving questions regarding my virginity on my *AskMe* page, the social media platform where you can even ask questions to others anonymously.

I scrolled down my question box and find lots of similar questions.

“Virgin?” – anonymous.

“When did you lose your virginity?” – anonymous.

“Wdyt about virginity?” – anonymous.

“Are you virgin?” – anonymous.

I started to think that I should answer those questions at least once because everyone thinks I am a virgin. So I typed a long reply to one of those anonymous.

“First of all, before I answer the question, don’t ever send me this kind of questions anymore since I will only answer this once. To every anons, why would you go around AskMe and ask women on their virginity? Does it benefit you if she is? Or does it harm you in some way? It is not, I believe. So whether I am a virgin or not a virgin is none of your business.”

I thought I replied with a great argument and those anonymous won’t bother me again. But I was wrong.. By midnight, my question box was even more flooded with bashings.

“So you are saying you are not a virgin?” – anonymous.

“Stop being so self-conceited. You whore.” – anonymous.

“You’re so hypocritical. I know you probably sleep around.” – anonymous.

“Shame on you for losing your virginity.” – anonymous.

I was so upset to see those kind of bashings towards me. It's not like I've done something wrong to them. Why are they sending me so much hate? Or... do they find out?

It was around two weeks ago, the day when I lost my virginity. I was completely conscious and sane. It was not an accident and I'm completely aware that it can never be brought back. I'd lie if I say I didn't regret it at all. However, I did it out of love.

I made love to Matt, the first man I ever loved.

He's the only man that ever loved me, too. I could never imagine losing him, not having him around in my life.

So I gave him my one and only virginity. I was afraid he'd leave me if I didn't.. I was foolish, I know. But that was all I could think of, to make him stay.

I gave my heart and sincerity thus I was able to do that. I am also well aware that I am now no longer the pure Cindy I was. I am dirty and stained. I am ashamed for what I did, for losing my virginity for I am still at the age where others would study and prepare to go into universities..

That's why I kept this a secret. Nobody else knows, but He and I. But these questions seemed weird, why would they ask me this kind of question if nobody told them about this.

Is it possible that Matt told them?

I was feeling uneasy by those questions those anonymous sent me, so I was going to close the AskMe application from my phone, then I took a glimpse of this question,

“What do you think about @cindyjessica who had already lost her virginity but pretend she is a virgin?” – anonymous.

That question was sent to lots of students from my school. It made me feel worse, yet I want to know what does people perceive this as. My curiosity brought me to all my classmates' AskMe pages. Some of them answered that they don't care, some answered that it's none of their business, and other similar answers.

.. their answers relieved me a little. I felt wonderful for living in such an open-minded society. I felt that my burden has lessened and I thought they would not pick on me because of those “true” rumours.

I forced myself to sleep and I kept believing that my anxiety and fear was just a bad dream.

Little did I know.. The nightmare only begins on the next morning..

Everyone was talking about me and bombarding me with hateful stares and question in the classroom.

Basically, they were judging me for my mistakes.

“Is what people saying in AskMe true?”

“Hey Cindy, you do know that what you did is wrong, right?”

Some confronted me head-on, just like that. However I can hear there are those who talked literally behind my back.

“She’s so easy, what a slut.”

“I know right, how is it she still show herself in school?”

I don’t have to turn my back to know who they are. I can recognize them from their voice. I wish I couldn’t though, since I still don’t have the guys to turn around and confront them.. I can just stay quiet while they stepped around me with their words.

Just before the third lesson, the school’s counselor called me.

“Cindy, I know it must be hard on you with those rumours around.” Ms. Symmetra said.

She added, “However, don’t mind them, we believe in you. You have always been a good student, you have never cause any trouble in school, so don’t let the rumours bother you and your studies, okay?”

I nodded my head quietly and left the counseling room.

What Ms. Symmetra said gave me some thoughts. I feel even worse. The teachers, was believing me yet I was breaking their trust while pretending to be completely innocent.

What if this rumour gets to my parents? Will they be the same as the teachers, or the exact opposite? They will hate me for being such an obscene daughter. They raised me so well, and yet all I did was disappointing them.

That whole day, not once I held my head high, I was extremely ashamed of myself.

I went home right away with my driver as soon as the last bell rang. I didn't talk to anyone, not even a word.

I felt so sick of everything, I felt so dirty and horrendous.

I don't even want to go to school anymore, it's timed hell. There was nobody who I can talk to in the house except the maid anyways, so I locked myself up in my bedroom.

Yet once again, I checked my AskMe, the stupidest thing to do right now, I know. I just couldn't help it, I want to know what are they talking about me, what they are thinking about me. Even though it will only hurt me more, I still want to know.

Their answers are still the same with last night, most of them stood of for me in AskMe, except for that one anonymous who sends the question to many people.

After that, I realized that the anonymous also send me a new question.

"How does it feel to have a boyfriend who tells everybody that he is just using you for sex?" – anonymous.

That snapped me like a lightning struck. I immediately called Matt to confirm the truth from him. I was trying to stay calm, but my anxiety ate me up,

"Hello?" he answered the call.

"How could you?!" I raised my voice unconsciously.

"What do you mean, babe?"

“I gave you everything, because I love you.. But is this how you are going to treat me?” I said, sobbing.

Two weeks ago, Matt actually said that he wanted to end our relationship. I was too scared of losing him that I begged him to not to leave me. I literally pleaded with my all for him to stay.

“What do I lack of?”

“Just tell me, I will fix it..So, please.. stay with me..” I cried.

“I love you more than anything else, I will do anything you want.. please don’t leave me..”

He answered to my cry coldly, “I want you. The whole you.”

Those words caught me by surprise, “What do you mean by that?!”

“I said, let’s make love. You said you will do anything, right?”

“I can’t.. I’m scared.. Besides, it would be my first time, you know it yourself, I have never dated anyone else besides you.”

“You said you love me so much that you’d do anything for me, right?”

“Well then, if you do, have sex with me.” He replied.

“I’m sorry Matt, I just.. can’t..” my tears ran down my cheeks like it’s raining.

“If you don’t want to, we can just break up.”

“You don’t trust me enough to make love to me anyway. That’s probably it,” said Matt.

I was afraid. I feared this day would come. I don’t want to lose him. Matt has been filling my empty heart with gestures of love and affection I have never experienced. He always kept me company since my parents were always busy. So I thought, maybe I should..

The next thing I remember was that it hurts so much. Matt kissed me on the forehead before he went home and said he loved me.

At that moment, I sure regretted it, but at the same time I was happy because that made him happy and that I had proved my love for him. Now, it seems different.. Maybe I was indeed foolish, and maybe.. just maybe.. I was deceived.

“Oh come on. It’s just sex” he said lightly.

“So you did tell people about that?”

“Why?!” I screamed. “Don’t you think about my feelings at all?”

I can hear him sighed slightly.

“Cindy, please stop with this crap.”

“It’s just what men do, okay?” he added, “I’m hanging up, bye.”

And that.. was all.

It was even way more painful than the sex we had two weeks ago.

The boyfriend that was the world to me, doesn’t even care the slight of my feelings and doesn’t even bother to listen to me.

Maybe he never loved me from the very beginning.

Maybe he was just after sex this whole time.

Maybe he thought I’m a loose and easy girl.

Maybe because I’m no longer a virgin, he lost interest in me.

And maybe he’s going to leave me after this..

And I was right. He never called back that day, and the next day after..

I felt so stupid and useless. Reminiscing about all that seems to be more hurtful to me than anything else. It was like a slap in the face. The pain hits me right away.

Just by knowing that tomorrow I have to go to school and face all the whispering scorns and disgusted stares turn my stomach. I don’t want to keep coming back to the living hell. I want to

just skip school, but that doesn't seem like a good idea, they'll talk about me more if I'm not around. So I dragged myself to school the day after.

Just like yesterday, people are still talking about me. I can't stand being in the classroom where almost all my classmates are gossiping around me behind my back, so I excused myself to the health care unit.

The nurse is never around, so it's quiet there. But it seems like I wasn't the only one who want to escape from the crowd. There was this one long-haired girl who sit on the bed next to the window, gazing outside.

I don't see her much in school, probably she's a senior. She doesn't show up often in school, which is good. Probably she haven't heard things about me. So I can be at ease here at least.

Ever since that day, excusing myself to the health room becomes a habit of myself. The long-haired girl were always there, too. I'd spend my time in the health room playing with my phone while she usually she would just gaze outside the window or sleep. It was a paradise of solidity of our own. We never exchanged any words, sometimes we just meet each other's eye. Her glance were never the judging or hateful stares I got from others as well.

I feel like the health room was my oasis, until today when I came back from the toilet. The health room was more cramped than usual as two of my gossiping classmates, Anna and Mimi, were there.

I quickly hid myself. I don't want to see their judging and disgusted stares at me again.

"Isn't she supposed to be here? She goes to this health room everyday doesn't she?" said Anna.

"Maybe that's just an excuse to skip classes and go to her boyfriend's to... you know," Mimi whispered the last words.

"You haven't heard? She got dumped! Her ex-boyfriend already dated a new girl from another school!" both of them laughed out loud from what Anna said.

What I just heard shocked me.. I really was just a tool for Matt, and I still can't deal with how people see me. Hearing that hurts me like a sharp knife stabbed onto my chest. I want to tell them to stop, but I don't have the courage. I can hold my anger, but not my tears.

"Ah, so noisy." The quiet long-haired girl who slept in the bed across my usual one woke up from their laughter.

She caught them off-guard, "Oh, sorry, we didn't know you were sleeping."

"By the way.. Have you seen a sophomore with medium length hair goes there just right after first break time?" Anna asked her about me.

Mimi added, "the girl who had sex with her boyfriend and then got dumped, Cindy, you must know her, right?" both of them chuckled again.

I was afraid she would be disgusted by me as well. I was so scared that the words might get even more everywhere.. when..

"Did I allow you to ask anything?" she replied to Anna and Mimi coldly.

"And, if she does or does not come here is none of your nor my business," she added, "don't you have something better to do than gossiping around?"

Anna was offended by her reply, "W-what?!"

"Wait, I think I ever heard about her, she's probably Laura, the loner of the third grade." Mimi whispered loudly to Anna.

"Aha! so you're just the same as Cindy? The whole grade's outcast? Haha!" Anna bursted into laughter, again.

Laura replied lightly "No, I don't even know her actually"

"Oh so that's why, so let me tell you.. she is.." just before Mimi finished her sentence, Laura interrupted, "I don't know her and I don't judge her. Why should you? Even if you think you do know her, you probably don't. So just shut up and mind your own business, would you?"

The two girls were very offended by her reply and decided to just get out of the health room.

“Stop hiding, I know you were there.”

I looked up and Laura was beside me. I can't say anything, I cried, and cried. Laura just stayed silent as she always do. But I feel at ease, because I know for a fact that she won't judge me like others did..

I stopped crying after a while, “Thank you.. Laura,” I said to her.

“What for?” she replied.

“For.. defending me just now?”

“I just don't like that they are noisy. I go to this health room everyday not to listen to their chatter, you know?”

I laughed for the first time in a while.. and I caught a slight smile on Laura's face.

She then talked to me, “Why don't you just talk back to them? Is what they are saying right?”

“Well, in a sense they were right though.” I replied honestly to her.

Laura's expression didn't change a bit, she said, “Oh. I see.”

“Aren't you disgusted by me?” I asked.

“Why should I? I am no god. I have no rights to judge you. And so does those two girls or anyone else.” Laura said while gazing into the window.

That reply of hers made me smile, “thank you for saying that.”

“No. I mean it.”

“Anyways, I know how you feel,” she continued, “I am an illegitimate child, born out of wedlock.” Laura said with a sad smile.

“I was hated for that fact. They said that's why I'm weird and unsociable.” She bursted into laughter, “they are the weird one, why would they create conclusions from that?”

I was amazed on how Laura can laugh it off so easily, but my curiosity made me ask, “So.. what happened with your mother and father?”

“My mother was raped.”

Hearing the truth, I felt so angry to everyone that judged and outcasted Laura, “They don’t know about that and they mocked you?!”

She smiled, “That’s why I said I have no rights to judge you. Nobody else has the rights, too.”

“We can’t judge people from hearing things from other people. We don’t live their lives. We can’t even judge people we know. We may not know everything. Am I right, or I am right?” she added.

I laughed again from her wit, “You’re amazing.”

“I know.” Laura said with a straight serious face.

We both laughed until classes ended that day. I learned a lot from Laura as my first “real” friend.

She has taught me that I need a little bit of ignorance in order to live. I also know that nobody has the rights to judge me based on my wrongdoings or good deeds. It’s life, I made mistakes and so does others. Nothing is perfect, and that is how life is.

Secret Stain

All the mistakes I made.
were all the things they forbade.

All the choices I choose.
were all the things they despise.

They treated me like a sinner.
Yet, I was happier than ever.

Soon, all the happiness were gone.
turned into miseries that won't wait on.

Everything seemed so hopeless.
My heart and soul was lifeless.

But then, I choose to be strong.
Because giving up is just wrong.

All the mistakes and wrong choices
were all in the past.

The present is where I shall rejoice
because all in the future is vast.

All I needed was to realize
That I was given a choice.

Two young, hopeful girls from different directions walked towards the same destination, their future. Both walked in their kitten heels, one in blue and the latter dressed in all black, with a surgical mask on her face in the middle of the bustling city of Jakarta.

Desta and Cindy their names are, the new interns of marketing division in a famed fashion company and today will be their first day of work.

As soon as they entered the company building, they rushed to the lift to reach the marketing division's office in the 6th floor. Upon their arrival, they were greeted with a delightful smile of their mentor, Miss Shelby.

"Both of you are the new interns, right?" she asked, both Desta and Cindy nodded and smiled nervously.

She chuckled a little, "Don't be so tense, after all we're working in Fashion field."

"Anyway, let us introduce ourselves first; I'm the head of marketing and merchandising division and I'll be your mentor for these three months, you can just call me Miss Shelby. Desta and Cindy, right?"

Because of Miss Shelby's warm welcome, both of them became less tense and got to introduce themselves to the rest of the office's member.

"So, Cindy and Desta, since this is your first day, there's not much of workload but you have to work in group as of today. All you need to do is to check on these surveys we did on our website and summarize the responses. Got it?"

"Yes, ma'am!" they responded in harmony.

"Am I not young enough to be called Miss?" she replied jokingly and left.

Cindy and Desta smiled and laughed a little.

"By the way, which university did you attend?" asked Cindy.

"I'm from Summerville University, in Semarang. How about you?" Desta replied with another question.

Cindy continued to introduce herself, “I’m from Clearwater College in Surabaya,” and the two interns continued with their first assigned work.

“Finally we finished it. It wasn’t as easy as I expected.”

“It sure is. I sure underestimated the working world,” Desta replied, “Let’s handle this to Miss Shelby, then.”

They met Miss Shelby in her office; she was a little surprised “You’re done? Already?”

Both of them nodded. “That was quick, good job. You can have lunch in around half an hour. The cafeteria is on the end of the left side hallway.”

At lunch break, the two girls sat together as they eat.

“I can’t seem to spot Miss Shelby.” Cindy said.

Desta looked around, and shook her head, “Neither can I. Maybe she’s still working?”

“Well, maybe. Don’t you think she’s a really amazing woman? She looks like in her late twenties and already is a head of a division!” said Cindy excitedly.

“Sigh. Indeed she is. But please do not forget that she is capable and not to mention, beautiful and smart and kind..” Desta replied, in contrast – pretty unenthusiastically.

“She’s just like.. so perfect. Her life is probably all roses and sparkles, unlike mine,” she continued.

Cindy stayed quiet and thought to herself that Desta’s words might apply to her too, “Maybe if I didn’t make that stupid mistake, I’d be living a life as amazing as Miss Shelby’s.”

The lunch ended with a full stomach of mixed feelings for those two.

As the clock strikes three, their first day of work had finished.

Just after Cindy and Desta were going home, Miss Shelby asked “Where do you two stay in Jakarta? Is it a boarding house?”

“Yes, I’m staying at the one near here, Miss.” Cindy replied, and added “How about you, Desta?”

“I’m staying at the nearest one here, the building above the family restaurant,” she answered.

“We’re living in the same boarding house! How come we didn’t meet each other this morning?” said the surprised Cindy.

Miss Shelby chuckled, “Isn’t that nice then?”

“I’ll drop you two off, it’s almost the rainy season, I guess you two didn’t bring your umbrellas, did you?”

The newly formed duo stared at each other and answered harmoniously, “Yes, Ma’am!”

Miss Shelby glanced a little which made them burst into laughter, then looked at each other again and said, “We meant Miss!”

“Pretty well. Follow me to the parking, then.”

In the parking lot, they were welcomed by Miss Shelby’s white car. It was kept clean and organized, just like what they’d expect of her.

Suddenly just when they were heading out of the office building, Shelby’s phone was ringing.

It was Miss Shelby’s. She immediately pulled over her car and answered the call.

“Hello? Yes, Shelby’s speaking. Is there something wrong, Miss?”

After listened to the caller, she remained silent for a second, then answered “I will be there soon.”

“Girls, do you mind if I pick up my son first? We can have dinner together afterwards.” She asked us, and explained that her son was feeling unwell at school so that she had to pick him up as soon as possible.

“Sure, Miss. No problem.” both of them answered.

“We didn’t you know you were married, Miss. You look so young!” Cindy said, with a very bubbly look on her face, “I can’t wait to see your son. He must be so cute! How old is he?” and kept bombing Miss Shelby with questions.

A faint smile can be seen on her face for a second, but it immediately became a very motherly smile as she started to talk about her four-year-old-son, whose name is Seth.

“He is probably just hungry because he didn’t eat anything at lunch break. He has gastritis and yet he’s a picky eater, just like me.” She said.

“Yeah, I heard once that gastritis is hereditary,” Desta said, “I had gastritis too because my dad has it.”

“Speaking of dads.. Where did you meet your husband? You are still very young yet you have a son who is four years old!” Cindy asked innocently, unbeknown to the fact that Miss Shelby was avoiding that topic.

“How old do I look, girls?” She laughed, “Don’t answer honestly, flatter me!”

Both of them guessed 25, which made her awfully happy.

“Anyway we’re almost here, I’ll pick him up in the classroom, just wait here. It won’t take long.” Miss Shelby said as she dismissed herself.

“Hey, Cindy. Don’t ask things about her husband anymore. Can you see her being very uncomfortable?” Desta said, out of the silence in the car.

“I know.. But why? Could it be they got divorced or something?”

“That might be. Just don’t ask anymore, okay?”

Cindy wondered, “What kind of man would leave a woman as perfect as Miss Shelby?”

“She might be the one who left. She’s the perfect woman.” Desta said, ominously.

That conversation left them with silence until the double S came to the car.

“Seth, say hi. This is Auntie Desta and Auntie Cindy.” Miss Shelby said to Seth excitedly.

“Hello, Aunties. My name is Seth.” The little boy said politely.

Cindy, who is a big fan of cute things, immediately went to heaven of cuteness.

“What do you want to eat, big boy?” asked the mother.

“Um.. Not sure, what do mommy wants to eat?”

They ended up in a cozy family restaurant nearby. It was a lovely early dinner, but not once Miss Shelby brought up a topic about Seth’s father.

“Maybe she really is a divorcee..” Cindy mumbled to Desta after Miss Shelby dropped them off to their boarding house.

Desta didn’t answer, yet she can’t help but thinking of the same thing. Their minds were pretty occupied that night. By these kinds of thoughts..

If a woman as perfect as Miss Shelby got dumped? What about me?

But then again, she’s capable and beautiful.. unlike me.

If being beautiful can’t help you to live a perfect life then what do I have left?

As they fell asleep, it was already morning. It’s time to get back to the working world.

Little did they know, a surprise was waiting for them in the office; a BIG surprise.

“Cindy, Desta. I want you two to do the presentation for our meeting with Svico Company. You have two days to prepare it. How about it?” Miss Shelby asked them right after they sat down in front of their desks.

“What?! But, why?” said Desta, startled.

Calmly Miss Shelby answered, “I just think this will be a great opportunity for you two to learn. So, how about it? Will you two take it, or not?”

Desta was still flustered when Cindy suddenly answered, “We will!”

“What?” Cindy said as she looked to Desta, who seemed unhappy with her one-sided decision.

“Okay, good. Here are the materials. All you have to do is summarize them into a short *PowerPoint* file and present them in front of the representatives on Thursday.” Shelby said as she butted into the staring contest between the two.

Without any further do, they were off to a rather bumpy start. It was their very first real presentation and there was none to guide them. So all they did was trying to figure it out by themselves.

Two days passed in the blink of an eye, and Thursday has arrived. As they were getting ready in the bathroom, Desta’s mind was full of thoughts, and so did Cindy’s. Full of fear of failure, as what happened in their pasts. Unfortunately, this time no one’s around to guide them.. Or so they thought.

“Are you girls ready?” said Miss Shelby, who surprised them with a tap on their shoulders.

“No.. I am not. What if we mess this up?” Desta answered.

Miss Shelby smiled, “Everyone makes mistakes. If you do mess up, it’s okay.”

“But....” Cindy mumbled to herself and thought, *what if make an unforgivable mistake, again?*

What happened in the meeting room was chaos. It didn’t went well until Miss Shelby took over the presentation.

“We need to talk, meet me in the parking lot, ” said Shelby right after they got out of the meeting room.

*Oh no, we’re going to get scolded for messing such an important presentation...*thought Cindy and Desta.

As soon as they met Miss Shelby in front of her car in the parking lot, Miss Shelby told them to get into the car and just drove. The atmosphere was pretty tense and quiet the whole time.

And as time that seems like forever passed, they were already in front of the family restaurant Miss Shelby took them to last time.

As they got inside, they seated themselves, in the table at the corner of the restaurant.

“Don’t be so down, you both did pretty well. Everyone makes mistakes, remember?” Shelby said, breaking the silence, which was followed by another silence, right after they finished ordering.

They both kept silent, but suddenly Cindy spoke, “But what if I already make too much mistakes?” She said, so emotionally that she broke in tears.

“Cindy’s not wrong. You might say so because it’s you, Miss. But I am not you, I am not everyone.” Desta added, as she put her head down, hiding her tears.

Miss Shelby was dumbfounded of what the two girls said. She looked at both of them, one cries, while one tries to hide her tears.

“Why are you two so afraid of mistakes?” she asked, out of pure curiosity.

Desta snapped, “You won’t know how it feels to be judged!”

“I’m flattered,” Shelby answered, “But I might know it better than anyone else does.” She continued with a question, “Why are you two so afraid to be judged?”

Desta touched her birthmark, “This is why, as you can see for yourself. People will judge me no matter what, because I’m not like everyone,” she said, “And just me being born into this world is a mistake itself.”

“I.. I’m not a virgin. That was already an unforgivable mistake!” Cindy butted into the conversation, “I did it once, and people looked down on me as I’m a prostitute.” She added, sobbing.

Both Desta and Cindy stopped talking, and the two girls just kept on crying.

“What do you know about me then? Why do you think I’m different?” Shelby asked.

Cindy answered, “You’re beautiful, capable...”

“Warm, smart, and probably is a perfect woman, unlike me.” Desta continued.

Shelby gave them a faint smile, and said, “I’ll take that as a compliment. So sad that it isn’t all true..”

“I’m a single mother as you two might have guessed. And it’s not because of divorce, but because I was never married. The man I loved left me when I was pregnant with his child and even told me to abort the baby.”

“In fact he pushed me from the stairs so that I’ll get a miscarriage, so that I won’t get to deliver my Seth,” She told them, while trying hard to keep her tears from flowing.

Desta and Cindy were both speechless. Little did they know, Shelby’s sorrow was incomparable to theirs.

As Shelby calmed herself down, she then looked at the two girls, then said, “But I was able to make it this far. Because I had Seth and I want him to live a good life.”

“I, too, realized that I was very young and stupid, but that’s all in the past. I can’t keep on dwelling and sulking on my mistakes. Because if I did, I won’t be who I am now.” She added.

Both of the girls were still crying, but it was not because they were hurt or afraid.

It was because they realized; that they had hopes and opportunities just as big as Shelby’s, as long as they tried.

“I was just like you two, afraid of making even more mistakes in my life. Yet, as I grew up, I realize that dwelling on the past and being a scaredy-cat won’t change anything. So I choose to move on and make efforts,” said Miss Shelby.

Cindy and Desta nodded, and then said harmoniously, “Thank you..”

“Aw, come on! Don’t be like that, I’m flustered now” said Miss Shelby who seemed to came back to her usual self.

The three of them laughed about all the things happened that afternoon, because they all know, mistakes can be mend, relationships might end, people might pretend, but of all things, life cannot be misspend.

Fear makes us alive, but to live, we need to be brave

